



AP sources: Asylum limits at border expected to end May 23

By COLLEEN LONG, JASON DEAREN and ELLIOT SPAGAT
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is expected to end the asylum limits at the U.S.-Mexico border by May 23 that were put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19, according to people familiar with the matter.

The decision, not yet final, would halt use of public health powers to absolve the United States of obligations under American law and international treaty to provide haven to people fleeing persecution, and would apply to all asylum-seekers.

Ending the limitations in May would allow for time to prepare at the border, the people said. But the delay runs against the wish-

es of top Democrats and others who say COVID-19 has long been used as an excuse for the U.S. to get out of asylum obligations. It also raises the possibility that more asylum-seeking migrants will come to the border at a time when flows are already high.

The Department of Homeland Security said Tuesday that about 7,100 migrants were coming daily, compared with an average of about 5,900 a day in February and on pace to match or exceed highs from last year, 2019 and other peak periods.

President Joe Biden declined to discuss his administration's plans, telling reporters Wednesday at the White House, "We'll have a decision on that soon."

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Nicaraguan migrants walk on the US-Mexico border, in Algodones, Baja California, Mexico, Dec. 2, 2021.

Associated Press

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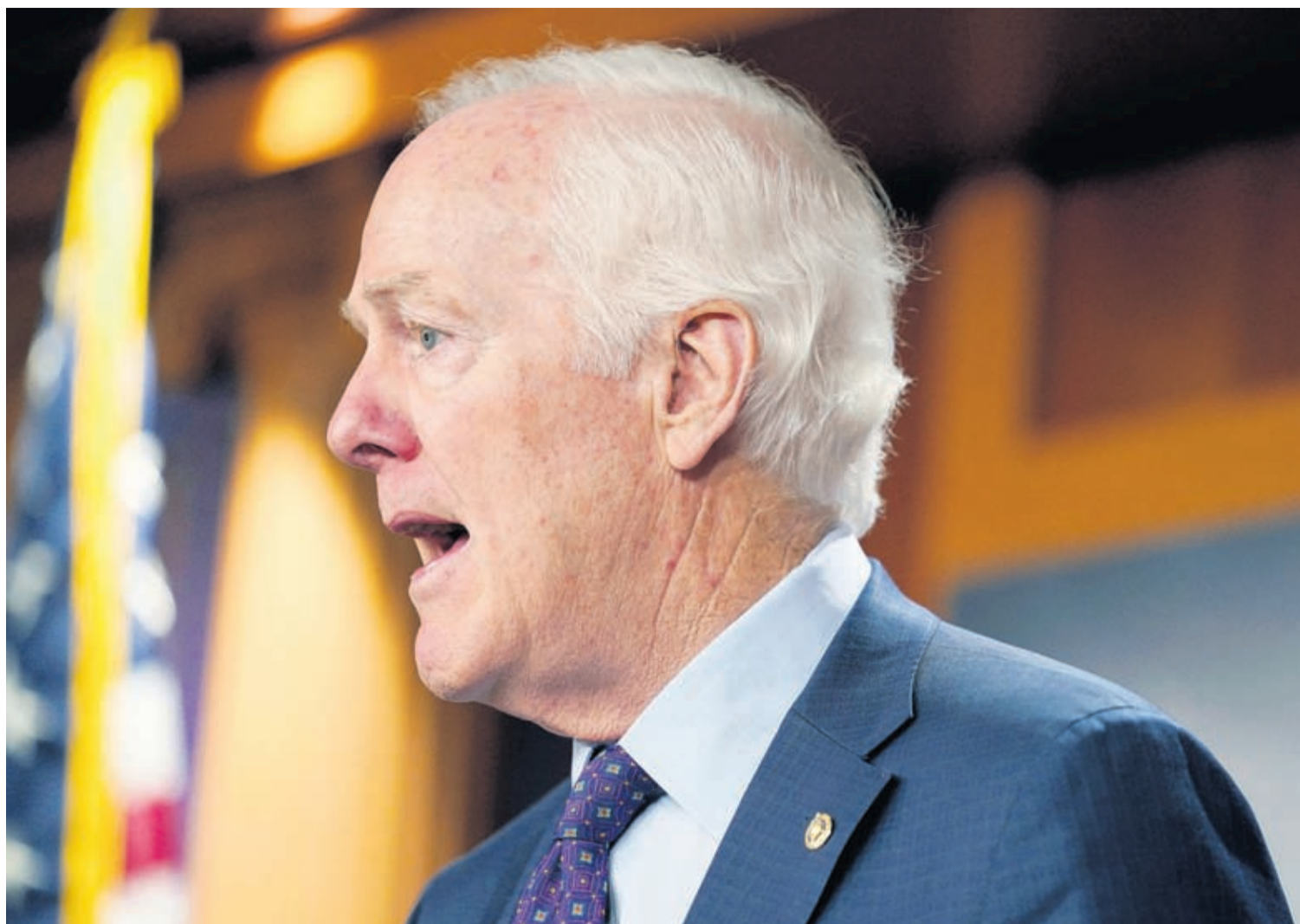
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Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, speaks to the media about the U.S. southern border, Wednesday, March 30, 2022, in Washington. **Associated Press**

Continued from Front

Whenever the limits are lifted, his communications director said "there will be an influx of people to the border. We are doing a lot of work to plan for that contingency." Speaking broadly, Kate Bedingfield said the administration is trying to "build up our migration system and ensure that we are restoring order at the border."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had extended its asylum-blocking powers for two months in late January, near the height of the omicron variant. The authority is up for renewal this week,

and officials were expected to announce as early as Friday that it would be terminated, giving border authorities a few months to prepare for the coming deadline.

The people familiar with the plans saw a draft report that has not been finalized and they spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the plans.

The limits went into place in March 2020 under the Trump administration as coronavirus cases soared. While officials said at the time that it was a way to keep COVID-19 out of the United States, there always has been criticism that the restrictions were used as an excuse to seal the border to migrants unwanted by then-President Donald Trump.

It was perhaps the broadest of Trump's actions to restrict crossings and crack down on migrants. The health order has caused migrants to be expelled from the United States more than 1.7 million times since March 2020 without a chance for them to request asylum.

And restrictions took effect over the objections of

CDC officials, and Dr. Martin Cetron of the Division of Migration and Quarantine refused the order to begin its use. He said there was no public health basis for such a drastic move, the AP reported. But then-Vice President Mike Pence ordered the CDC's director to use the agency's emergency powers and it went into effect.

As mask mandates were lifted, vaccination rates climbed and COVID-19 rates dropped among migrants crossing from Mexico it became increasingly difficult to defend the order on scientific grounds.

Biden, who has rolled back some of Trump's other more restrictive policies, has taken increasing criticism for keeping the policy.

Homeland Security officials, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York and other top Democrats were increasingly vocal about wanting to end so-called Title 42 authority, named for a 1944 public health law to prevent communicable disease.

Not all Democratic elected officials agreed, including some from border and swing states. Sens. Mark Kel-

ly and Kyrsten Sinema, both Arizona Democrats, sided with Republican leaders to say Title 42 should remain until U.S. border authorities were prepared for sharp increases in new arrivals.

"The Border Patrol agents told me they expect a tsunami of humans to come across the border and the Border Patrol has said they will lose control entirely," said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas. Homeland Security officials said they are planning for as many as 18,000 arrivals daily, an astounding number that they cautioned was simply to prepare for all possible outcomes, not projections.

But there have been no major changes to how migrants are processed at the U.S.-Mexico border and no increase in holding facilities for them. The immigration court backlog continues to soar to more than 1.7 million cases.

Critics say Title 42 has been an excuse to avoid asylum obligations under U.S. law and international treaty, buying Biden time to create the "humane" asylum system that he promised during his 2020 campaign. "Title 42 is a horrific and un-

justified policy that should never have been enacted and has caused grave harm to thousands of asylum-seekers over the past two years," said immigration attorney Lee Gelernt of the American Civil Liberties Union.

While there is no aggregate rate for migrants, COVID-19 test results from several major corridors for illegal border crossings suggest it is well below levels that have triggered concerns among U.S. officials.

In California, 54 of 2,877 migrants tested positive in the first two weeks of March, according to the state Department of Social Services. That's a rate of just 1.9%, down from a peak of 28.2% on Jan. 8.

In Pima County, Arizona, which includes Tucson, the seven-day positivity rate among migrants didn't exceed 1.3% in early March. The positivity rate among 5,300 migrants tested last month at the Regional Center for Border Health near Yuma, Arizona, was 0.1%.

McAllen, Texas, the largest city in the busiest corridor for illegal crossings, has a higher rate among migrants — 11.3% for the week ending March 16 — but it has been consistently lower than the general population.

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky noted falling rates when she ended asylum limits on unaccompanied child migrants on March 11, while keeping them for adults and families with kids. In August, U.S. border authorities began testing children traveling alone in their busiest areas: Positives fell to 6% in the first week of March from a high of nearly 20% in early February. Asylum limits have been applied unevenly by nationality, depending largely on costs and diplomatic relations with home countries. Many migrants have been spared from Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and, more recently, Ukraine. Homeland Security officials wrote border authorities this month that Ukrainians may be exempt, saying Russia's invasion "created a humanitarian crisis." □

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Biden receives 2nd booster, presses Congress on virus funds

By ZEKE MILLER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden called on Congress to pass billions of dollars in additional funding to fight the COVID-19 pandemic on Wednesday, as he received a second booster dose of the Pfizer vaccine a day after federal regulators approved a fourth shot for those aged 50 and older.

Biden spoke as his administration rolled out COVID.gov, designed to be a one-stop website to help people in the United States access COVID-19 tests, vaccines and treatments, along with status updates on infection rates where they live. Biden pressed lawmakers to provide additional funding "immediately" to ensure continued supply of the tools that have helped the nation begin to emerge from the pandemic.

"Congress, we need to secure additional supply now," he said, warning of shortages of vaccines, tests and treatments. "This isn't partisan, it's medicine."

Biden, 79, received the first series of two doses of the coronavirus vaccine shortly before taking office and a first booster shot in September. The additional booster



President Joe Biden receives his second COVID-19 booster shot in the South Court Auditorium on the White House campus, Wednesday, March 30, 2022, in Washington.

Associated Press

dose was administered by a member of the White House Medical Unit.

"It didn't hurt a bit," Biden said.

The additional booster is meant to beef up the body's protection against COVID-19 in populations most vulnerable to the coronavirus, which has killed more than 975,000 people in the U.S.

On Tuesday, the Food and Drug Administration and

the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cleared the way for another shot for anyone 50 and older, who can get the additional booster at least four months after their last vaccination. Severely immune-compromised patients, such as organ transplant recipients, as young as 12, are also eligible.

"We have enough supply to give booster shots, but if Congress fails to act we

won't have the supplies we need this Fall," Biden warned, noting the possibility that regulators will approve a fourth shot for all Americans.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, have been negotiating in hopes of reviving the COVID-19 package.

If an agreement emerges, participants say they expect it to be similar to the

\$15.6 billion bipartisan version that congressional leaders crafted earlier this month. The original compromise collapsed after rank-and-file Democrats rebelled against cuts in unspent pandemic aid for states that would have helped pay for it.

The two parties' continuing disagreements are over how to find savings to offset the measure's cost, not the new spending itself.

Leaders would like Congress to approve the assistance before lawmakers leave for a spring recess after next week.

"We are not yet at the finish line, but we will keep working throughout the day," Schumer said Wednesday.

He said if a new COVID variant emerges that "extends its nasty tentacles across the country and we don't have the tools to respond, then woe is us."

Romney said Tuesday that bargainers were discussing savings options. "But we're making progress and hopefully we'll get there soon," he said.

A subvariant of the highly transmissible omicron that scientists call BA.2 is now the dominant coronavirus mutant in the United States. □

Police chief: More officers needed to fully reopen Capitol

By KEVIN FREKING

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The chief of the U.S. Capitol Police told lawmakers Wednesday it was his recommendation to move forward with a phased-in reopening of the U.S. Capitol as his agency works to overcome attrition after the January 6 insurrection and hiring delays because of the pandemic.

The testimony before a House subcommittee underscores that persistent security concerns are playing a major role in restricting the public's access to the Capitol, an increasingly sore point with lawmakers from both parties who are urging a return to normalcy after two years of restrictions.

U.S. Capitol Police Chief Thomas Manger said the department doesn't have the personnel to staff the number of posts deemed necessary to secure the Capitol and adjacent offices. Additional posts were added after Jan. 6.

"I regret we're the chokepoint, we're the problem in terms of getting it reopened fully," Manger said.

The Capitol saw a return of more visitors this week with congressional offices limited to leading one tour weekly. The adjacent Capitol Visitor Center would reopen for limited numbers of people on May 30.

"By the end of the summer, my hope is that we can do a little bit more," Manger said.

Hundreds of officers from

the U.S. Capitol Police and Metropolitan Police Department responded to the Jan. 6 attack and dozens of them were beaten and injured as the mob of former President Donald Trump's supporters pushed past them to break into the building and interrupt the certification of President Joe Biden's victory.

Congress has boosted funding for the agency after Jan. 6 to increase hiring, cover overtime costs and bolster the security of the complex itself. Hazard bonuses were paid to officers who responded to the insurrection and retention bonuses were paid to curb attrition levels that temporarily doubled their normal rate.

The budget for the coming



The reflection of the U.S. Capitol during a early rainy morning, is reflected in a skylight in Washington, Wednesday, March. 30, 2022.

Associated Press

fiscal year recommends about a 17% increase in funding.

Manger said it takes time to get in place the number of officers the agency needs, though. He said the agen-

cy has about 1,850 officers, but is about 300 short of where it needs to be. Some of those positions have already been authorized and about 130 officers are in training. □

Mississippi could become final state with equal pay law

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS
JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Mississippi could become the final state to enact a law requiring equal pay for equal work by women and men, after the state House and Senate passed the final version of a bill Wednesday.

The bill goes to Republican Gov. Tate Reeves, and he has not said whether he will sign it. When he was lieutenant governor, Reeves let a similar bill die.

A 1963 federal law requires equal pay for equal work, but Mississippi is the only state without its own equal pay law. Alabama enacted one in 2019.

The Mississippi bill says a worker must file a lawsuit within two years of when the worker "knew or should have known" about pay discrepancies.

If the lawsuit is successful, the worker could receive court costs, attorneys' fees and the amount she — or he — should have received to cover the wage gap. No additional financial damages would be allowed.

Cassandra Welchlin, leader of the Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable, advocates for equal pay but said the bill is "harmful" because it would allow an employer to pay a woman less than a man based on the pay history that workers bring into new jobs.



Sen. Angela Turner Ford, D-West Point, left, listens to Sen. Nicole Boyd, R-Oxford, discuss legislation, in the Senate Chamber, Monday, March 28, 2022, at the Mississippi Capitol in Jackson.
Associated Press

She said the bill also allows lower pay if a worker has taken months or years off to care for children or older parents.

"During this pandemic, women have been forced to leave the workforce for caregiving responsibilities," Welchlin said Wednesday. "It's just an equal pay bill in name only."

House Bill 770 says businesses with at least five employees must pay equal wages to women and men who work fulltime jobs that require "equal skill, education, effort and responsibility" and that are done "under similar working condi-

tions." Several exceptions are allowed, including seniority, merit, quantity or quality of production and "any factor other than sex," including salary history and whether there was competition to hire an employee.

Republican Sens. Brice Wiggins of Pascagoula and Nicole Boyd of Oxford were among the six lawmakers who negotiated the final version of the bill. Wiggins described it as "business friendly." Boyd said the bill is "a good step in the right direction."

"It says to young women, 'We care about you stay-

ing the state of Mississippi.' We want you to work here, and we want your rights to be protected," Boyd said.

Democratic Sen. Angela Turner Ford of West Point voted "present," which counted neither for nor against the bill. She said after the vote that employers could save money by paying unequal wages because lawsuits could be difficult to win. Turner Ford also said the bill does not ban unequal pay based on race.

"White men, Black men, white women, Black women — there's no reason for each of these individuals to

work the same job and not receive the same rate of pay," Turner Ford said.

Separate federal laws ban pay discrimination based on race or disability. Although people can already file federal lawsuits seeking challenging unequal pay based on sex, Mississippi Attorney General Lynn Fitch said filing a lawsuit in state court could be less expensive.

A 2017 report by the Mississippi University Research Center showed women earned 27% less than men for fulltime work in Mississippi, compared to a 19% wage gap nationwide. The study said some of the gap could be explained by the types of jobs women and men were working, but the unexplained wage gap remained about 18% in Mississippi and about 15% nationwide.

Fitch, a Republican, has pushed for an equal pay law for years. In a statement Wednesday, she called it "basic fairness."

If Reeves signs the bill into law, Fitch said: "We will take a giant leap forward in closing the 27% pay gap — a pay gap that makes it harder for working women and their families, that leads to young Mississippi women taking their talents beyond our borders and that perpetuates the cycle of poverty in our state." □

Police: 12-year-old killed by younger brother who found gun



Family members of a deceased 12-year-old boy grieve at the scene where police say the child was shot and killed while playing with a gun that he and a 10-year-old found inside a home in St. Louis on Tuesday, March 29, 2022.

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — A 10-year-old boy fatally shot his

12-year-old brother as the two played with a gun they found inside a St. Louis home, police said.

The shooting happened Tuesday night in a north St. Louis neighborhood, KMOV-TV reported. Police said the boys were with a parent who was getting a haircut in the home when the older boy was shot in the face.

Police said a woman was arrested Wednesday on a possible charge of endangering the welfare of a child, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported.

The death follows a spate of shootings in St. Louis involving children handling guns.

On Friday, two young cousins who were livestreaming from a St. Louis apartment died when one child fatally shot the other before killing herself in what family members have said was an accident.

In February, a 12-year-old girl was wounded in an accidental self-inflicted shooting.

St. Louis Metropolitan Police Maj. Ryan Cousins urged residents to use gun locks.

"As an agency, we will come out and teach everyone how to use them," Cousins said. "We do understand people are going to own guns; however, to protect these children, we

want to ensure these guns are secured safely."

According to a leading gun control advocacy group, Everytown for Gun Safety, in 2020, unintentional shootings by children under 18 years old in the United States left 142 people dead and 242 wounded.

In 2021, the number of deaths climbed to 154 and the number wounded rose slightly to 244. According to the group's data and St. Louis' most recent gun deaths involving children, at least 20 people have been killed and more than 30 have been wounded in such shootings so far this year. □

Number of Ukraine refugees passes worst-case U.N. estimate

By **BASSAM HATOUM** and **JAMEY KEATEN**

Associated Press

MEDYKA, Poland (AP) —

The number of people who have fled Ukraine since Russian troops invaded has surpassed 4 million, the United Nations reported Wednesday as shelling continued in places where Moscow had vowed to ease its military operations.

"I do not know if we can still believe the Russians," refugee Nikolay Nazarov, 23, said as he crossed Ukraine's border into Poland with his wheelchair-bound father.

Despite Russia's announcement during talks on Tuesday that its forces would ease their assault near Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, and elsewhere, Nazarov said he expects "more escalation" in the country's east, including the city he and his father fled. "That is why we cannot go back to Kharkiv," he said. "We are afraid of a new phase of war in eastern Ukraine."

Nazarov, like other refugees interviewed by The Associated Press, echoed the opinion of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. In his nightly video address, Zelenskyy said that given what was happening on the ground, there was no reason to believe Russia's statement about



Refugees, mostly women and children, wait in a crowd for transportation after fleeing from the Ukraine and arriving at the border crossing in Medyka, Poland, on March 7, 2022.

Associated Press

reducing military activity near Kyiv and in Chernihiv, a besieged northern city.

"We can call those signals that we hear at the negotiations positive," Zelenskyy said in his address to the Ukrainian people. "But those signals don't silence the explosions of Russian shells." For Diana Konstantynova, a 45-year-old accountant from Vinnytsia in south Ukraine, Russia's promise to scale back its attacks is not a signal she can safely return home.

"I do not believe in a truce," said Konstantynova, who fled to Romania with her

8-year-old son a month ago. She says they will only return when "bombs stop exploding in my city" and "when Russian troops completely leave our territory." Elena Litvinova, a 33-year-old accountant from Mykolaiv, is also skeptical of Russia's promises and will only head home with her two young children when "our president says that the war is over."

"During the negotiations, the city administration and children's educational institutions where my children studied were destroyed," she said at a refugee cen-

ter in Romania's central city of Brasov, where she says they will stay until the war is over. "It's still very scary, every day we get messages from home that there is shooting and bombing."

Olha Kovalyova, who arrived in Poland with her two children, said she didn't trust Moscow because it had failed to fulfill earlier promises made in the framework of 2014 and 2015 agreements aimed at ending fighting between Russia-backed separatists and Ukrainian forces in the eastern Donbas region.

"The Minsk agreement is

not working, so how can we call it peace talks if they are shooting and bombing our cities during and after the talks?" Kovalyova said. "There is no trust in Russia, but also I hope for peace and calm, but unfortunately this is the situation."

The U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR, said Wednesday that more than 4 million people have left Ukraine since Russia launched its invasion on Feb. 24 and sparked Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. That number exceeds the worst-case predictions made at the start of the war.

Half of the refugees from Ukraine are children, according to UNHCR and the U.N. children's agency UNICEF.

"I think it's a tragic milestone," Alex Mundt, the UNHCR senior emergency coordinator in Poland, said. "It means that in less than a month or in just about a month, 4 million people have been uprooted from their homes, from their families, their communities, in what is the fastest exodus of refugees moving in recent history."

More than 2.3 million refugees from Ukraine entered Poland, but some have since traveled on to other countries. □

Defense seeks acquittal of Russian suspect in MH17 downing

By **MIKE CORDER**

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands

(AP) — A lawyer for a Russian on trial in a Dutch court for his alleged role in the 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 argued Wednesday that prosecutors failed to prove he was involved.

Defendant Oleg Pulatov's legal team has attempted to cast doubt on the prosecutors' case, accusing them of tunnel vision and not adequately investigating other possible scenarios for the shooting down of MH17 on July 17, 2014, over eastern Ukraine.

Prosecutors say the Boeing 777 was hit by a Buk missile belonging to the Russian 53rd Anti Aircraft Mis-

sile Brigade that was driven to the launch location "by orders of and under guidance of the suspects." All 298 passengers and crew were killed.

"Our client is not the one who pressed the button, not the one who ordered the button to be pressed, not the one who authorized the button to be pressed and not the one who provided the weapon," said defense lawyer Sabine ten Doesschate.

Pulatov is the only one of four suspects indicted in the downing of the Amsterdam-to-Kuala Lumpur flight being represented by lawyers at the trial that began two years ago. None of the men three Russians and a

Ukrainian has been arrested, so they are being tried in their absence.

Prosecutors in December sought life sentences for all four suspects. Judges are expected to deliver verdicts by the end of the year.

The flight was shot down amid the conflict between pro-Russian rebels and Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Last month Moscow launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine that has become bogged down into a war of attrition that forced more than 4 million refugees to flee the country and triggered a war crimes investigation at the International Criminal Court.

Earlier this month, the



Judges and lawyers view the reconstructed wreckage of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, at the Gilze-Rijen military Airbase, southern Netherlands, on May 26, 2021.

Associated Press

Dutch and Australian governments launched a legal case against Russia at the International Civil Aviation

Organization seeking to hold Moscow accountable for its alleged role in the downing of MH17. □

U.N. experts seek to verify mass graves for migrants in Libya

By **SAMY MAGDY** and **JAMEY KEATEN**

Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Investigators commissioned by the U.N.'s top human rights body on Wednesday painted a grim picture for migrants in Libya, just days after saying they were looking into claims that mass graves have been found at a human trafficking center in the country's northwest.

Chief investigator Mohamed Auajjar, a former Moroccan justice minister, said the team of investigators had documented "consistent patterns of serious human rights violations" against migrants in government-run detention centers and trafficking hubs.

Libya has in recent years emerged as a popular, if extremely dangerous, route toward Europe for those fleeing poverty and conflict in Africa and the Middle East. The North African nation plunged into turmoil following the NATO-backed 2011 uprising that toppled and killed long-time dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

In the northwestern town of Bani Walid, the fact-finding experts commissioned by the U.N.-backed Human Rights Council found that "migrants were held captive, murdered, tortured



Migrants are brought to shore after being intercepted by the Libyan coast guard on the Mediterranean Sea, in Garaboli Libya, on Oct. 18, 2021.

Associated Press

and raped."

In interim findings presented to the council this week, the investigators said at least eight migrants had spoken about mass graves in the town, something the investigators said they needed to verify.

Speaking to The Associated Press on the sidelines of the council session in Geneva, Auajjar said his office "received information about other sites as well, where there may be mass graves, but the investigations are ongoing."

Auajjar said his team of about 15 investigators, based out of the Tunisian capital of Tunis, are going over all of the cases and vetting the information received.

"We receive a lot of information from NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and authorities, and we want to check them with ethics and rigor," he said. Alluding to the council's next session, when his office will present a full written report, Auajjar said: "In June, we will be able to

announce concrete results and if necessary, if we have the necessary evidence, we will name those responsible for these claims."

He told the council earlier that investigators were also examining the existence of secret detention facilities including some controlled by armed militias.

In the report, investigators said they continued to receive reports of detainees "being threatened with sexual violence against them or their relatives, being stripped naked for

prolonged periods of time or subjected to intrusive body search amounting to rape."

Also Wednesday, Germany said that its military will no longer provide training to Libya's coast guard because of concerns over its treatment of migrants. The Libyan coast guard has been trained and equipped by the European Union as part of efforts to stanch the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean.

The investigators said in an October report that they had evidence of possible crimes against humanity and war crimes in Libya. Many of the alleged crimes, they say, were committed against civilians and migrants detained in the country while trying to get to Europe.

The investigators also said that the Libyan coast guard has mistreated migrants and handed some over to detention centers where there is widespread torture and sexual violence.

A confidential report by the head of Operation Irti, obtained earlier this year by the AP, acknowledged "excessive use of force" by the coast guard but called for European training programs to continue, despite longtime outcry from right groups. □

Haitians protest rising insecurity; some burn a plane



A plane burns after being set on fire by demonstrators protesting increasing violence at the Antoine Simon Des Cayes airport in Les Cayes, Haiti, Tuesday, March 29, 2022.

Associated Press

By **EVENS SANON**

Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE,

(AP) — Haitians

Haiti took to

the streets Tuesday to protest rising insecurity, with demonstrations turning violent in the southern city of

Les Cayes where people stormed the airport and attacked and burned a small plane owned by a U.S. missionary group.

At least one person died and five others were injured, including four police officers, in the confrontation between protesters and authorities in Les Cayes, said Gedeon Chery, a National Police inspector assigned to the city's airport.

Chery told The Associated Press the person killed was a protester who was shot, but he didn't say whether police were responsible.

A second small plane was burned at the local airport of the city of Jacmel, but it wasn't clear if it was also

part of an attack by some protesters, said Garry Desrosiers, the National Police spokesman. The aircraft was non-operational and had been stationed there for a while, he added.

The protests coincided with the 35th anniversary of Haiti's 1987 Constitution and follow other protests and strikes in recent weeks amid a spike in gang-related kidnappings and complaints about Prime Minister Ariel Henry's inability to confront gangs. On his Twitter account, Henry condemned the violence in Les Cayes and said he has ordered authorities to look for the people behind it.

Chery, the police inspector, said a group of people

had gotten onto the terminal's tarmac, attacked the plane and set it on fire.

A video posted in social media showed some people on the plane's fuselage while the red-and-white aircraft was moving on the tarmac, and others running alongside it. Chery said he didn't know why they attacked it.

Agape Flights, a Christian ministry transporting supplies to missionaries in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas, said in a statement that "Our team is safe."

It said Agape's Chieftain aircraft was destroyed and they are preparing to bring the ministry's team back to the U.S. □

El Salvador forces encircle neighborhoods in gang crackdown

MARCOS ALEMÁN

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — Security forces intensified operations against El Salvador's street gangs Tuesday with mass arrests, the cordoning off of neighborhoods and house-by-house searches under a state of emergency that has raised concerns among some organizations it could open the door to human rights abuses.

Rather than back down under growing criticism, President Nayib Bukele appeared ready to double down, announcing late Tuesday that he had asked the president of the Congress to convene lawmakers to give him more legal tools to take on gangs. The country's relatively low homicide rate during Bukele's administration had been one of his most touted accomplishments. Even while some raised doubts about how it was obtained, the country had been living in peace compared to earlier periods of bloodshed. That changed last weekend when 89 people were killed in a four-day span, compared to 79 in all of February. The Congress

passed Bukele's state of emergency early Sunday giving authorities broad latitude in making arrests and extending jail time while investigations are carried out. Attorney General Rodolfo Delgado told state television that in the past two days nearly 1,500 alleged gang members were captured "without firing a single shot."

Only two murders were confirmed Monday compared to 62 on Saturday. "I've been a victim of the gangs, I've paid them (extortion)," said Esteban Maravilla, who works in transportation. "They should lock them all up." Bukele enjoys extremely high popularity in El Salvador, but some heavy handed tactics have faced criticism.

Opposition politicians and nongovernmental organizations say security forces are going beyond even their newly enhanced powers. Human Rights Watch said in a statement Tuesday that the government should confront gang violence, but while respecting rights. "Instead of protecting Sal-



Soldiers man a checkpoint at the entrance to the Las Palmas Community, a neighborhood that is supposed to be under the control of Barrio 18 Gang in San Salvador, El Salvador, Sunday, March 27, 2022.

Associated Press

vadorans, this broad state of emergency is a recipe for disaster that puts their rights at risk," the organization said.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights condemned measures that keep incarcerated gang members inside their cells 24 hours a day and reduce their food to two meals a day.

"The measures implemented in the prisons constitute policies of a repressive nature that can result in serious violations of the humans rights of persons deprived of liberty," the commission said.

Stéphane Dujarric, spokesman for United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said Tuesday the Secretary General was concerned with the sharp increase in gang killings and trusted that measures taken by the government would be in line with international human rights law and standards.

Bukele responded via Twitter that the organizations criticizing his actions now had done nothing to help El Salvador battle the gangs. □

Bay of Bengal nations resolve to face calamities together

By KRISHAN FRANCIS

Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP)

— An organization of seven Bay of Bengal nations said its members must urgently use their geographical advantage and other resources to address their post-pandemic vulnerabilities and collectively strengthen their ability to face future calamities. In a declaration on the final day of a three-day summit Wednesday, the group, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Corporation, said its members resolved to work together to combat poverty, natural disasters, climate change, pandemics and transnational crime.

They also agreed to work toward food and energy security and strengthen their links to increase trade, investment, tourism and technology, and offset economic losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. "The developments in Europe in the last few weeks have raised a question mark on the stability of the international order. In this context, it has become important to make BIMSTEC regional cooperation more active," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a virtual speech.

"It has also become imperative to give more priority to our regional security." He said India will contribute \$3 million to revive the BIMSTEC Center for Weather and Climate to enable cooperation in disaster management. The leaders also signed a BIMSTEC charter, which the summit's host, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Raja-

paksa, said "will no doubt be a significant step toward increasing this organization's role, not just within the region, but also as a driving force from Asia in global affairs."

Leaders from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand all addressed the summit virtually. Myanmar's foreign minister, Wunna Maung Lwin, represented his country remotely. He also participated remotely in a meeting of foreign ministers on Tuesday that was attended in person by the other ministers. Myanmar's military leader has not been allowed to participate in meetings of another regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, following the army's seizure of power in February 2021 and violent suppression of

opposition to its rule. Officials and ministers of the BIMSTEC member countries also signed three agreements on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, a

technology transfer facility and cooperation between diplomatic academies. Thailand took over as BIMSTEC's chair nation for the next two years. □

technology transfer facility and cooperation between diplomatic academies. Thailand took over as BIMSTEC's chair nation for the next two years. □



Foreign Ministers of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) countries, from left to right, Nepal's Narayan Khadka, India's Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Don Pramudwinai of Thailand, Gamini Lakshman Peiris of Sri Lanka, A.K. Abdul Momen of Bangladesh, Tandi Dorji of Bhutan and Myanmar's Wunna Maung Lwin pose for a photograph during their meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Tuesday, March 29, 2022.

Associated Press

technology transfer facility and cooperation between diplomatic academies. Thailand took over as BIMSTEC's chair nation for the next two years. □

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The history of The Bulldog goes back to 1975 when founder Henk de Vries took over his father's shop in Amsterdam's famous Red Light District and turned this place into the world's very first coffee shop. Today, The Bulldog is an international company with multiple locations in Barcelona, Rome, Ibiza, Silver Star (Canada BC) and, of course, home base Amsterdam.

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Papillon: the butterfly effect of magnificent food

PALM BEACH — Do you remember the film "Papillon" starring Steve McQueen? Papillon restaurant is the island's example where 'life imitates art.' The décor, especially the restrooms, was inspired by the movie. For more than a decade this restaurant has built a reputation with the fusion of classic French cuisine, Dutch and Caribbean flavors. Welcome in the world of wonders where ambiance, taste and service come together and you feel you are being welcomed in the home of the owner and her team.

"We find it really important that our guests have fun; can relax while listening to live music while their taste buds are being tickled by France, The Netherlands and the Caribbean. We offer a unique fusion of dishes and a night not to forget," says owner Tina. She points out that all Covid-protocol is in place here, they are very keen on hygiene and offer outside dining on a cozy, elegant terrace with social distancing in place and right on the high-rise strip.

Fresh oysters, caviar and wild boar

You are on vacation, life is to enjoy! If you

want something special, a different flow than the usual then Papillon is the place to go. Foodies are in heaven here with classic French dishes such as Foie Gras, Frog Legs, fresh Oysters coming in on a weekly basis from Holland, Escargots, Dover Sole à la Meunière flown in from Europe and filleted at the table, Duck Breast seared on the skin, roasted and braised Lamb in Balashi beer and slow braised Wild Boar Shank. Do not leave without trying the exclusive recommendation: Caviar! All of this combined with an extensive wine list from around the world makes Papillon a must-do on your Aruban vacation.

Let the music play!

We will give you another reason to visit: on Monday's and Friday's the famous Marisela who enchants you with her acoustic performance accompanied by percussion only; on Thursday's and Saturday's you can enjoy the tunes of live sax player Jairo and on Sunday's and Tuesday's Jose Herrera will enchants you with his keyboard talent. The musicians interact with the guests, requests can be send in, the live tunes definitely add to the experience.



Vegetarian vibes present

Impressive vegetarian/vegan dishes are set up especially for the guests by the chef and Meredith from Vegan Aruba. "We offer vegan choices that are really good and tasty. Our daily soup is always vegan too." What are you waiting for, make sure to pay a visit to this elegant yet laid-back restaurant while on Aruba. You are most welcome! Papillon Restaurant is located at The Village across the Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino and within walking distance of all other major hotels.

Make your reservation today at:

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 For all menus and specials visit the website: www.papillonaruba.com



Fundashon Stimami Sterilisami receives a 8,000 dollar donation from American foundation One Love



ORANJESTAD - Fundashon Stimami Sterilisami received a generous donation of 8,000 dollars from an American non-profit organization named One Love Foundation.

The donation will help Stimami Sterilisami continue with their national sterilization campaign. During the last 2 months the foundation received more than 2,300 registrations and has helped 28,592 sterilizations since 2016 and february of this year. The donation made my One Love will be duplicated dollar for dollar by Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, making it another generous donor, and together they will cover an additional 500 sterilizations of both

dogs and cats. "We are thankful from the bottom of our hearts to Ellen Sirianni, Berkley Cameron and the full team of One Love Foundation for their generous contribution and all the help they are providing to Stimami Sterilisami. It is heart moving to see the effort that they are putting into helping our foundation and Aruba mitigate the suffering and abandonment of our animals, and they are doing everything they can from the U.S," Ewald Biemans, President of Fundashon Stimami Sterilisami and owner/CEO of Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort explained.

"Ever since we started 2 years ago, we have



worked hard to change the lives of animals on Aruba by helping rescue organizations with food, medical care, refuge, medical materials and sterilization. But we realized that we need sterilization en masse so we can truly help these organizations, seeing as this is the one way we can attack the source. We are working hard to continue providing our help and support to Fundashon Stimami Sterilisami so we can steril-

ize as many cats and dogs as possible!," Ellen Sirianni, president of One Love Foundation expressed.

On top of the great 8,000 dollar donation, for the second time this year, One Love Foundation brought gifts and necessary materials to Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort for their program Pack For A Purpose that supports Imeldahof.

Pack For A Purpose is an

international organization that has the mission of bringing a positive impact to communities worldwide by helping travelers that want to make a significant contribution to the destination that they visit. Bucuti & Tara Beac Resort is proud to be a member of Pack For A Purpose since August in 2015 and donations with an average weight of 423 kilos every year thanks to the support and help from its visitors and other donors. □

In preparation for Wings of Hope's SDG School Champion Challenge 2022: AAA and Grant Thornton Aruba organized a seminar for participating schools

ORANJESTAD - Aruba Airport Authority N.V.'s (AAA) "Wings of Hope" (woh) together with Grant Thornton Aruba organized a seminar on Saturday March 26, 2022, for schools That will be competing in woh's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) School Champion Challenge 2022.



A total of 16 schools participated in the SDG School Champion Challenge seminar 2022. The seminar program was filled with various presentations, valuable tips, and necessary tools to prepare a solid Sustainable project plan and a friendly SDG competition.

For the first part of the seminar, Grant Thornton Aruba gave a presentation on United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals followed by AAA's woh presentation on a total of 3 projects completed in 2020, 4 projects completed in 2021 and a total of 6 ongoing and planned projects for 2022.

During the second part of the seminar, Grant Thornton Aruba provided the schools with a solid Sustainable project plan and budget presentation explaining how this should be filled out and what are the most important points to consider. To complete the seminar, the schools were mixed up

and groups were created for a friendly SDG competition. Each group had 30 minutes to come up with a Sustainable project plan using a specific budget and choosing 1 or more sdgs as their focus. At the end of the time allocated, each group had to present their Sustainable project plan to the woh team, Grant Thornton Aruba, and SDG Aruba.

AAA's woh team, Grant Thornton Aruba and SDG Aruba were very impressed by each group's creativity, choice of sdgs for their Sustainable project plan, allocation of budget and overall grasp of the con-

cept. The schools were very excited and ready to start working on their Sustainable project plan to be submitted to woh by May 13, 2022, where the winning school will receive AWG 20,000.00 to execute their plan.

AAA woh and Grant Thornton Aruba are very happy with the attendance of the schools to the SDG School Champion Challenge seminar 2022 and are certain that with the presentations and necessary tools received, the schools will deliver a solid Sustainable project plan to woh. □

4 big expenses you could face in retirement

By KATE ASHFORD of NerdWallet

Retirement planning is part savings, part guessing game. While many of your day-to-day expenses will remain the same, there are big-ticket categories that can take a large bite out of your savings. The more you can plan, the better prepared you'll be to weather the costs.

Here are four expenses to keep in mind as you prepare for retirement:

1. HEALTH CARE

The average 65-year-old retired couple will need about \$300,000 in after-tax savings to handle health care costs in retirement, according to a 2021 report from Fidelity. Fidelity is a NerdWallet partner. "And that's just for regular health care," says Michelle Gessner, a certified financial planner in Houston. "That's not even counting unexpected chronic illness care."

Your specific costs will depend on where you live, how long you live and your overall health. Taking care of your health and adequately managing conditions like Type 2 diabetes can help keep costs lower. The other health care surprise is that Medicare premiums are higher if your income is above a certain level. For example, if you're married filing jointly with a modified adjusted gross income over \$182,000 in 2020, you'll pay at least 40% more for your Medicare



In this June 15, 2018, file photo, cash is fanned out from a wallet in North Andover, Mass.

Associated Press

Part B monthly premiums. In 2022, the standard premium costs about \$4,000 a year for a couple.

"It really creeps up," says Laurie Burkhardt, a CFP in Boston. "And it's easy, believe it or not, to get to that income level when you are at the age where you're taking required distributions from your IRA."

2. LONG-TERM CARE

Seniors who live to 80 have about a 1-in-4 chance of needing long-term care. And it's not cheap: An assisted living facility costs \$4,500 a month, on average. And while a home health aide averages about \$27 per hour, the costs add up.

"That's pretty reasonable if

you only need a few hours of care per week," says Patti Black, a CFP in Birmingham, Alabama. "That math becomes unworkable, the more care you need."

Certified financial planners can help clients project costs for a few years of long-term care to ensure their savings can handle it. "I talk with clients about whether long-term care insurance should be part of their financial plan to transfer some or all of this risk," Black says.

3. DENTAL CARE

The average senior on Medicare using dental services paid nearly \$900 a year out of pocket, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. And 1 in

5 Medicare beneficiaries spent more than \$1,000.

Original Medicare doesn't cover most traditional dental care, and 47% of Medicare beneficiaries go without any dental insurance. But gum disease, tooth loss and oral cancer are all greater concerns for seniors, and finding comprehensive dental insurance can be difficult.

"Dental procedures can be a really rude awakening," Burkhardt says. "I'm going through it right now with my husband, who is retired and is getting a dental implant. He's been shocked at how much the out of pocket is."

4. PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Since 2015, at least 1 million enrollees per year in

Medicare Part D have had drug costs high enough to exceed the catastrophic coverage threshold, which is \$7,050 in 2022. If you have a condition that requires specialty tier drugs — such as cancer, multiple sclerosis or hepatitis C — your out-of-pocket costs can be exceptionally high. Once you hit the catastrophic threshold, you'll pay either a small coinsurance or copay for drugs, but there's no cap on out-of-pocket spending under Medicare Part D; it can add up if your drug is expensive.

"My dad has rheumatoid arthritis, and his drugs cost \$6,000 per month," says Tess Zigo, a CFP in Palm Harbor, Florida. "What retiree has \$6,000 a month just for drugs?"

WHAT TO DO

A financial planner specializing in retirement needs can stress test your financial plan for health events and other expenses. If there are gaps in your coverage, they can help you with strategies to address unexpected costs, such as considering long-term care insurance or a hybrid policy that combines life insurance with a long-term care rider.

Getting the right insurance, from Medicare Supplement plans to dental and drug coverage, is also essential. "If the coverage is correct, then those catastrophic expenses aren't so bad," says Dennis Nolte, a CFP in Winter Park, Florida. □

Waymo to expand autonomous vehicle rides to San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Waymo's self-driving ride-hailing service is branching out to San Francisco.

The autonomous vehicle unit of Alphabet, Google's parent company, said Wednesday that it started carrying employees in electric Jaguar I-Pace SUVs without human backup drivers. Previously the company had been testing the vehicles with a safety driver behind the wheel just in case.

Waymo didn't elaborate on when it might offer au-

tonomous rides to the public in San Francisco. The company has been using autonomous minivans without human backups to carry passengers in the East Valley of the Phoenix metro area since 2020.

Waymo also announced Wednesday that soon it will expand driverless rides to Downtown Phoenix. The program will start by carrying Waymo employees with safety drivers in the vehicles, with a goal of opening those rides to residents who join a "trusted tester" pro-

gram soon after. No date was given for when the humans would be pulled from the vehicles.

The testing in San Francisco comes as competitor Cruise LLC, a General Motors subsidiary, is seeking a permit to charge for fully autonomous rides in the city. Cruise is operating a small fleet of autonomous vehicles that it opened to the general public at the beginning of February. GM expects to get a permit to charge passengers for autonomous rides this year. □



In this April 7, 2021 file photo, a Waymo minivan arrives to pick up passengers for an autonomous vehicle ride, in Mesa, Ariz.

Associated Press

CROSSWORD

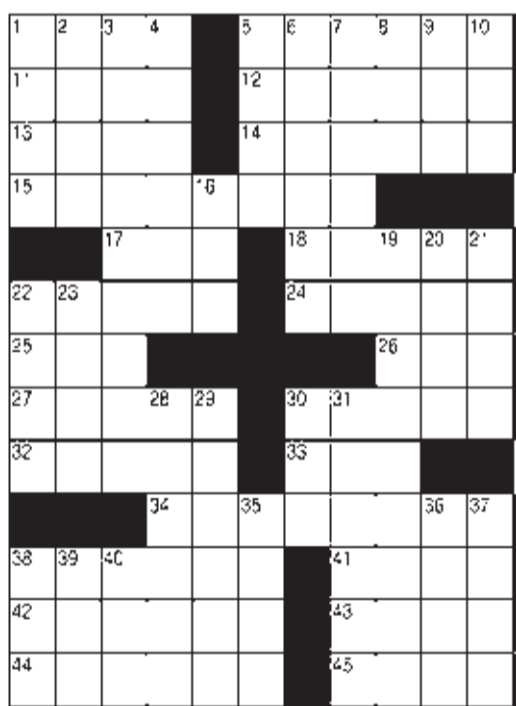
By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS** 43 Luke's sister
1 Con-temptible
5 Grow sick of
11 Diva's piece
12 Climate-affecting current
13 Sprightly dances
14 Bath problem
15 Sticky stuff
17 Chiding sound
18 Key
22 Grating
24 Stage comment
25 Sculpting medium
26 Collins base
27 Stews
30 Phoenix source
32 Wild
33 Exciting, in slang
34 Look like
38 Pate cover
41 Dessert fruit
42 Show up

- DOWN**
1 Mexican peninsula
2 Parched
3 Tourist
4 Become laxer
5 Big truck
6 Colman of "The Favourite"
7 Except if
8 Relieve
9 Count start
10 At present
16 Sow site
19 Bar choice
20 TV's Falco
21 Addition column
22 Musical phrase
23 Land unit
28 La Brea sight
29 Shirt part
30 Bar choice
31 Not flashy
35 Parrot morsel
36 Den
37 Important times
38 Smidgen
39 Raw metal
40 Hot water dispenser



Yesterday's answer



3-31

A XYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-31 **CRYPTOQUOTE**
FR YHGRG JHRSEJL RH GWB
GHDNRSEJL UFJA NINJ XNGG
RH GSCR CQ WXRHLNRSNM.

— JWRSWJ EFXFHJ
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE SEA, ONCE IT
CASTS ITS SPELL, HOLDS ONE IN ITS NET OF
WONDER FOREVER. — JACQUES COUSTEAU

U.S. astronaut ends record spaceflight with Russian ride home



NASA astronaut Mark Vande Hei gives the thumbs up outside the Soyuz MS-19 spacecraft after he landed with Russian cosmonauts Anton Shkaplerov and Pyotr Dubrov in a remote area near the town of Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan on Wednesday, March 30, 2022.

Associated Press

By **MARCIA DUNN**
AP Aerospace Writer

A NASA astronaut caught a Russian ride back to Earth on Wednesday after a U.S. record 355 days at the International Space Station, returning with two cosmonauts to a world torn apart by war.

Mark Vande Hei landed in a Soyuz capsule in Kazakhstan alongside the Russian Space Agency's Pyotr Dubrov, who also spent the past year in space, and Anton Shkaplerov. Wind blew the capsule onto its side following touchdown, and the trio emerged into the late afternoon sun one by one.

Vande Hei, the last one out, grinned and waved as he was carried to a reclining chair out in the open Kazakh steppes.

"Beautiful out here," said Vande Hei, putting on a face mask and ballcap. Despite escalating tensions between the U.S. and Russia over Vladimir Putin's war

with Ukraine, Vande Hei's return followed customary procedures. A small NASA team of doctors and other staff was on hand for the touchdown and planned to return immediately to Houston with the 55-year-old astronaut.

Even before Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, Vande Hei said he was avoiding the subject with his two Russian crewmates. Despite getting along "fantastically ... I'm not sure we really want to go there," he said.

It was the first taste of gravity for Vande Hei and Dubrov since their Soyuz launch on April 9 last year. Shkaplerov joined them at the orbiting lab in October, escorting a Russian film crew up for a brief stay. To accommodate that visit, Vande Hei and Dubrov doubled the length of their stay.

Before departing the space station, Shkaplerov embraced his fellow astronauts as "my space broth-

ers and space sister." "People have problem on Earth. On orbit ... we are one crew," Shkaplerov said in a live NASA TV broadcast Tuesday. The space station is a symbol of "friendship and cooperation and ... future of exploration of space." The war tensions bubbled over in other areas of space with the suspension of European satellite launches on Russian rockets and the Europe-Russia Mars rover stuck on Earth for another two years. □

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Linklater charmingly chronicles life in 1969 Houston

By **LINDSEY BAHR**
AP Film Writer

The geniuses at NASA accidentally build the lunar module a little too small for an adult in "Apollo 10½: A Space Age Childhood." In Richard Linklater's first foray into animation since "A Scanner Darkly," a few fast-talking NASA men (Glen Powell and Zachary Levi) recruit an average local elementary school student, Stan, to test it out for them on a top secret mission to the Moon. It's the kind of thing kids have been dreaming about for over 50 years.

Memory is a funny thing, of course, and no one fantasizes as freely as a kid. For this imaginative spirit living in the Houston area in the late 1960s near NASA at its heyday was like "being where science fiction was coming to life. The optimistic, technological future was now and we were at the absolute center of everything new and better," he says.

It should be said that our narrator Stan (Milo Coy voices him as a kid, Jack Black as an adult) is a bit of a fabulist. Not that it matters, "Apollo 10½" is only sort of about Stan's fantastical trip to the Moon before Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins took off in Apollo 11. It is a breezy nostalgia-fest, in rotoscope, about a very specific childhood in a very specific place with an adult nar-



This image released by Netflix shows the character Stan, voiced by Milo Coy, in the animated film "Apollo 10 1/2: A Space Age Childhood."

rator telling us the story of his childhood. His siblings teased him for not being in many family photos because, as he says, at that point his family had given up on documenting every move of their children.

And it is not dissimilar to retrospective coming-of-age larks like "Stand by Me," "Now and Then" and "The Wonder Years," with its earnest, wry observations. Stan takes us through daily life as a 10-year-old in 1969 as the youngest of six children

in a neighborhood where it seemed like everyone worked for NASA in some capacity, though he can't help but wish that his dad had a position that took him to space, not an office. Linklater is almost too good at making you wistful for times you were never part of. And even so, there is universality in Stan's life in the sandwiches they would make on Sunday and unfreeze throughout the week for school lunches, the myriad ways his moth-

er would use a ham for a weeks' worth of dinners, or memories about seeing "The Sound of Music" multiple times a week for at least a few years straight. Stan explains he was part of the last of the "duck-and-cover" generation, though hardly the last to fear that there would be no future at all.

There's a paradox to living in a time that worships the future while also predicting the end. As if kids don't have enough anxiety al-

ready.

And for Stan this is manifested in a strange reality where the space race seemed to permeate the most mundane aspects of daily life, from the wire rockets on their playgrounds and the desperation to give everything — even advertisements in the newspaper — a connection to the astronauts.

There may be a little bit of projection going on in regards to Stan's immediate appreciation of "2001: A Space Odyssey." He's either the coolest 10-year-old film scholar out there or this is also a riff on our fallible memories. Who's to say Stan (and Linklater) didn't really get the famous white room? There's also the unshakable feeling that we've seen this all before. We kind of have: 1969 is not exactly an undocumented time, especially for a middle class white family and this doesn't push many boundaries. And yet as with most Linklater joints, it's so sincere and so sweetly true that you can't really fault it for not reinventing the wheel. Just like a story that your parents have told or maybe you've told a million times before, it's comforting. So put that ham casserole on the stove, pull up a chair and enjoy hearing one more time about how someone who grew up with a black and white television set never knew Oz was in color. □

Associated Press

Bruce Willis, diagnosed with aphasia, steps away from acting



Actor Bruce Willis appears at the premiere of "Glass" in New York on Jan. 15, 2019.

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Bruce Willis is stepping away from acting after a diagnosis of aphasia, a condition that causes loss of the ability to understand or express speech, his family announced Wednesday.

In a statement posted on Willis' Instagram page, the 67-year-old actor's family said Willis was recently diagnosed with aphasia and that it is impacting his cognitive abilities.

"As a result of this and with much consideration, Bruce is stepping away from the career that has meant so

much to him," read the statement signed by Willis' wife, Emma Heming Willis, his ex-wife Demi Moore, and his five children, Rumer, Scout, Tallulah, Mabel and Evelyn.

"We are moving through this as a strong family unit, and wanted to bring his fans in because we know how much he means to you, as you do to him," they said. "As Bruce always says, 'Live it up' and together we plan to do just that."

Aphasia typically occurs after a stroke or head injury, but can also develop grad-

ually due to a slow-growing brain tumor or a disease that causes degenerative damage. It is treated primarily with speech therapy and learning non-verbal means of communication. The news about Willis, one of Hollywood's most beloved actors, immediately spread online as fans reacted. His four-decade career has amassed more than \$5 billion in box office worldwide,

Willis had been working steadily and frequently. Renowned for films like "Die Hard," "Pulp Fiction" and

"The Sixth Sense," Willis has in recent years churned out straight-to-video thrillers. Last year, he starred in a staggering eight films. Most came and went quietly, including titles like "Cosmic Sin," "Out of Death" and "Deadlock."

Most recently, Willis starred in last month's "Gasoline Alley" and "A Day to Die," released in early March. Willis has already shot at least six more films due out in 2022 and 2023, including "Die Like Lovers," "Corrective Measures" and "The Wrong Place." □

NFL owners approve rule change for OT in playoffs

By **BARRY WILNER**

AP Pro Football Writer

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — It

took a few years, and for many fans that probably was too long.

Still, the NFL has heard the cries of "unfair" and has adjusted its overtime rules.

Only for the postseason, though.

The NFL is changing the sometimes controversial overtime rules to guarantee each side gets the ball in the playoffs.

Concerned that the coin toss to begin the extra period has too much impact on postseason game results, the owners voted Tuesday to permanently approve a proposal presented by the Colts and Eagles.

Beginning this season, if the team possessing the ball first in overtime scores a touchdown on that series, the opponent still gets a possession. In recent seasons, that touchdown would have ended the game.

That second possession of overtime would extend beyond the initial 15-minute period if needed. Should that team tie the game, it then would become sudden death.

Outcries began back in the February 2017 Super Bowl when Tom Brady completed an incredible comeback from a 28-3 deficit to tie the game. The Patriots won the coin toss, marched to a touchdown and beat the Falcons.

In the 2018 season, New England won the AFC title on the first series of OT without Kansas City getting the ball.

When the same thing happened in Kansas City during this January's divisional game between the Bills and the Chiefs, won by KC, a groundswell became an uproar.

"We always listen to fans," Commissioner Roger Goodell said. "What brought this decision was the database and the facts. When you see that, this is an issue in the postseason."

Rich McKay, the Falcons president and chairman of the competition commit-



NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell answers questions from reporters at a press conference following the close of the NFL owner's meeting, Tuesday, March 29, 2022, at The Breakers resort in Palm Beach, Fla.

Associated Press

tee, admitted that Kansas City's victory over Buffalo was a factor in the balloting by owners. He said that was well beyond the required 24 votes, but would not reveal the exact numbers.

"I think what the stats show is there is a clear issue we can say since the change (in rules) in 2010," McKay added, "and the problem comes in the postseason." Since the previous overtime rule was instituted for the regular season in 2012, the team that wins the coin toss has won the game half of the time (76 of 152 games). However, both teams have had at least one possession in 82% of the games (124 of 152).

Those numbers changed quite a bit in the postseason. Since 2010, when that rule was instituted for the playoffs, seven of the 12 overtime games have been won on an opening possession touchdown, and 10 of 12 have been won by the team that won the coin toss.

"That data was compelling to us and to the league," McKay said. "An amendment was added (to the

original proposal by the Colts and Eagles) to not make a change in the regular season, but in the postseason, where our problem principally lies."

The Titans had recommended that both teams possess the ball in overtime unless the team receiving the kickoff scores a touchdown and a 2-point conversion. That would end the game. But the owners, perhaps believing the Tennessee suggestion was too gimmicky, went with the other proposal.

Under previous rules, the 10-minute overtime in the regular season only continued if the team getting the ball first failed to score or kicked a field goal. Should the side receiving the kickoff make a field goal, the team that first played defense would get a possession in which it can score a

touchdown and win, or kick a field goal and play would continue — if time allowed. Of course, in the postseason, when there are no ties, overtimes continue until someone has more points. Goodell concluded the meetings by urging caution regarding the Deshaun Watson situation and the NFL's investigation. The quarterback, who did not play for Houston last season after 22 women accused him of sexual misconduct, will not be indicted on criminal charges. Now with the Cleveland Browns after a trade, Watson still faces civil lawsuits.

"We're going to let the facts lead us, find every fact we can," Goodell said. "At least there is a resolution from the criminal side of it. Our investigation hopefully will have access to more information."

As for a potential suspension for Watson, Goodell noted that a discipline officer jointly appointed by the league and players' union would make that determination.

Goodell said if the league discovers a violation in Dolphins owner Stephen Ross' conduct regarding the integrity of the game, the information would be released publicly.

Former Dolphins coach Brian Flores has sued the NFL and three teams (Miami, Denver and the New York Giants), claiming racist hiring practices. Flores also has accused Ross of offering him a bonus to lose games in 2019, something the owner vigorously has denied.

Earlier Tuesday, Carolina coach Matt Rhule voiced his support of a potential change — something that many owners agreed with, if only for the postseason.

"You get a shot, I get a shot," Rhule said, "and may the best team win."

Troy Vincent, who oversees NFL football operations, echoed Rhule's sentiment, saying that football fans have expressed the same opinion.

"The fan wants to see his quarterback touch the ball, and the data drove us to that," Vincent said.

The owners also approved an anti-tampering rule that prohibits a team seeking an assistant general manager from asking permission for an interview until after the draft. As Vincent explained, someone in personnel for one team who has been involved in draft preparation should not be available for hire by another club until the draft is over.

Once the draft has concluded — this year that is April 30 — the employing team must grant permission for such interviews. □



Women's Final Four can be a financial windfall for players

By **PAT EATON-ROBB**

Players at the women's Final Four this week have been calling for equity in their sport on various fronts — just not when it comes to cashing in on their celebrity. Turns out they just might be better at capitalizing on the new rules than their male counterparts.

Women's basketball is ranked second, behind only college football and ahead of men's basketball in the amount of income generated by name, image and likeness deals, according to Blake Lawrence, the chief executive of Opendorse, a company that helps colleges and athletes navigate the NIL landscape.

As their exposure increases during the NCAA Tourna-



Stanford forward Cameron Brink (22) celebrates with teammates as confetti flies after Stanford beat Texas 59-50 in a college basketball game in the Elite 8 round of the NCAA tournament, Sunday, March 27, 2022, in Spokane, Wash.

Associated Press

ment, members of Final Four teams — and especially stars such as Paige Bueckers, Cameron Brink, Aliyan Boston and Hailey Van Lith — will have the

opportunity to make tens of thousands of dollars from endorsement deals, experts say.

That's on top of the money that top social-media influ-

encers, such as Bueckers, are already making, which Lawrence estimates is up to \$1 million.

"There are women basketball players that are pulling in up to \$20,000 for one tweet leading up to March Madness," he said. "You can imagine that each round there is another online advertiser that would be interested in compensating them handsomely."

Details on individual deals are not generally publicly released, not by the schools, athletes or the companies paying for the exposure. But it's not hard to figure out and breakout performances — such as Bueckers' 27-point effort in UConn's double-overtime thriller over North Carolina State in front of a large TV

audience — only enhance earning potential.

"When you have all eyes on you, marketing values skyrocket," Lawrence said.

Bueckers, who has long-term deals with companies such as Gatorade, said she told her agents that she is not doing any more endorsements until the tournament is over because she wants to focus on basketball.

"I think women's basketball is doing really well in that regard, just with the opportunities we're given, and sort of the chances we're getting in the field," she said. "I think we're taking great strides with it, and I think that's really important for the growth of our game."

LaKeisha Marsh, a Chicago attorney who specializes in higher education and college athletics, agrees.

Marsh, who also teaches sports law and ethics at Northwestern, said many players have done a better job than the schools in marketing women's college basketball to a young audience.

"These women dominate social media, whether it's their presence or ability for their audience to relate to them on so many different levels," she said. "Young people who watch these TikTok videos and see these various brands on social media, now they want to see these women in action."

Marsh said she is concerned that many of the top money-makers, at least at this point, are white women. As more companies notice there is a big young, racially diverse audience on social media, she said she hopes that will change.

There are general guidelines that limit what schools can do with NIL as a recruiting enticement, but it's a very loose area. Notre Dame coach Niele Ivey said she will point out to recruits the center that the school established to help athletes navigate NIL. She also believes that young women will be attracted more to schools that consistently make runs in the tournament. □

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